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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2099 (2013), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 April 2014 and requested the Secretary-General to provide a report to it on the situation in Western Sahara well before the end of the mandate period. It covers developments since my report dated 8 April 2013 (S/2013/220) and describes the situation on the ground, the status and progress of the negotiations and the existing challenges to the Mission's operations, as requested by the Council in its resolution 2099 (2013).

II. Recent developments

2. The situation in Western Sahara, as it presents itself to MINURSO, is generally calm. The ceasefire continues to hold and the people can live without fear of a resumption of armed conflict in the medium term.

3. That part of Western Sahara under control of Morocco, west of the berm marking the ceasefire line, continued to witness considerable Moroccan investment in infrastructure and in the social and cultural sphere. Public life proceeded peacefully, and holidays brought large numbers of people into the streets, generally without incident. This was at least in part due to the extensive presence of security forces.

4. An increased number of delegations from foreign legislatures and diplomatic missions, as well as governmental and non-governmental institutions and journalists, visited the western part of the Territory. Moroccan authorities showed increased openness to and engagement with such visits, although on occasion visitors deemed hostile to Moroccan interests were denied access to or expelled from the Territory.

5. Some underlying discontent, however, remained perceptible among the Saharan population, expressing itself in sporadic demonstrations in Laayoune and other towns in the western part of the Territory throughout the reporting period.

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These were usually small in scale, but at times the participation of up to 300 demonstrators was reported. These demonstrations aimed at drawing attention to human rights concerns, socioeconomic issues and political demands, including the right to self-determination. They were swiftly dispersed by Moroccan security forces. On most such occasions, there were credible reports of heavy-handedness on the part of security forces, as well as violence, such as stone-throwing, on the part of demonstrators. At times, the regional offices of the Moroccan National Human Rights Council (*Conseil national des droits de l'homme*) in Laayoune and Dakhla deployed observers and tried to defuse tensions and prevent clashes.

6. Of particular note was a demonstration that took place in Laayoune on 5 May 2013, following several days of smaller demonstrations in Laayoune and other towns in the western part of the Territory. Protesters expressed dissatisfaction that Security Council resolution 2099 (2013) did not include provisions to include human rights monitoring in the mandate of MINURSO. Although MINURSO was unable to verify the precise scale of this protest, the authorities estimated the number of participants at approximately 2,000, while the organizers claimed up to 10,000. As such, it was the largest protest in the Territory since the Gdim Izik events of November 2010 (see S/2011/249, para. 3). Initially, both sides exercised restraint and the demonstration proceeded peacefully, but in the end clashes erupted between protesters and Moroccan security forces, causing injuries to an estimated 150 people, on both sides, and a number of arrests.

7. In October 2013, the President of the Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council presented King Mohammed VI with the Council's final report on a new development model for the so-called "southern provinces", which include Western Sahara but also extend to some areas north of the Territory. The report is part of a broader regionalization process launched by King Mohammed VI and followed a critical assessment published in December 2012 (see S/2013/220, para. 15). The underlying discontent cited earlier was confirmed in the assessment of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, which highlighted feelings of frustration, impatience and injustice, attributed among other reasons to a lack of clarity in social welfare policies. The report advocated freeing development policy from the constraints of security imperatives and concluded that the development model applied in the Territory in the past had reached its limit. The new model proposed was centred instead on the imperatives of sustainability, participatory democracy and social cohesion, as well as responsible governance, including respect for human rights. Meaningful implementation of the new development model proposed by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council will depend on changes in the electoral framework before the 2015 local elections.

8. In the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, to the extent that MINURSO and the United Nations agencies on the ground could observe, people were able to conduct their lives in a peaceful and generally calm atmosphere. Major public events, which at times attracted significant numbers of foreign visitors, were held without incident. The socioeconomic status quo, however, began to be brought into question, including by the authorities of the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente Polisario). In successive meetings with United Nations personnel and Frente Polisario officials, it was suggested that addressing the needs of a situation that can no longer be characterized as a short-term emergency requires policies favouring sustainability and increased self-

reliance for the population living in the camps, even as the search for a solution to the conflict continues.

9. Some degree of dissatisfaction among the population in the refugee camps was perceptible, in particular among the youth. There is growing frustration at the lack of progress in the political field and at the difficult socioeconomic conditions in the camps. Several factors have contributed to the worsening conditions. External humanitarian assistance has decreased, owing to constraints faced by donors. The ability of Saharans to find employment in Europe and send remittances to the camps has suffered with the economic downturn. An additional factor has been the economic impact of the increased security measures recently instituted along the border between Algeria and Mauritania. A segment of the camps' population that depends on income from cross-border trade perceived these measures as a limitation of freedom of movement, although the Algerian authorities and Frente Polisario characterized them as a simple regulation, not limitation, of movement.

10. Small-scale demonstrations in the camps were occasionally reported, including by Frente Polisario officials. One such demonstration was conducted in front of a compound of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Rabouni near Frente Polisario headquarters. Approximately 10 to 15 protesters established a small encampment, calling for human rights in the Territory and the refugee camps and for freedom of movement. The protest was launched after a January 2014 incident in which two Saharans were shot dead during an anti-smuggling operation conducted by Algerian security forces near a border crossing between Algeria and Mauritania. The Head of the Algeria country office of UNHCR later met with the protesters and persuaded them to stop a hunger strike that they had initiated.

11. Moroccan and international investments in the part of the Territory under Moroccan control, as well as in the territorial waters adjacent to Western Sahara, were the subject of contention between Morocco and Frente Polisario, given the longstanding status of Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory. A new protocol of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco was signed in the final quarter of 2013 and came into effect in February 2014, following ratification by Morocco. The Secretary-General of Frente Polisario wrote to me repeatedly to condemn Morocco's exploitation of the Territory's resources and publicly announced his intention to consider a possible judicial appeal against the agreement. The agreement was also the subject of some of the demonstrations cited earlier.

12. Frente Polisario also sent me letters indicating its concern that Morocco has renewed contracts with foreign oil companies that have announced their intention to accelerate plans for further seismic surveys and to drill exploration and appraisal wells in the territorial waters and seabed areas of Western Sahara. Such contracts were addressed by the Legal Counsel, at the request of the Security Council, in a legal opinion dated 29 January 2002. The opinion states that "while the specific contracts which are the subject of the Security Council's request are not in themselves illegal, if further exploration and exploitation activities were to proceed in disregard of the interest and wishes of the people of Western Sahara, they would be in violation of the principles of international law applicable to mineral resource activities in Non-Self-Governing Territories" (S/2002/161, para. 25).

III. Activities of my Personal Envoy

13. Yet another approach in the efforts of the United Nations to facilitate negotiations between the parties to achieve "a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara" (see Security Council resolution 2099 (2013), para. 7) was initiated during the current reporting period. Given that 13 rounds of face-to-face talks on the basis of the parties' two proposals of April 2007 have produced no result, my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara decided to engage in a period of bilateral consultations with the parties and neighbouring States to gauge whether the parties are prepared to be flexible in developing the elements of a compromise solution and how the neighbouring States can be of assistance.

14. This new approach was launched during my Personal Envoy's March-April 2013 visit to the region. By the end of the reporting period, he had undertaken three rounds of consultations with the parties and neighbouring States in the framework of the new approach and had begun a series of renewed visits to the capitals of the members of the Group of Friends of Western Sahara to confirm their support. In all these activities, and particularly in his periodic interaction with Saharans themselves, my Personal Envoy benefited from the reporting, insights and logistical assistance of my Special Representative in Western Sahara and head of MINURSO and the entire staff of MINURSO.

A. 2013 consultations in the region

15. From 20 March to 12 April 2013, my Personal Envoy undertook a first set of consultations in the region to obtain each party's agreement in principle on holding confidential bilateral discussions with him and engaging in shuttle diplomacy as warranted. During these consultations, he urged the parties to enter the forthcoming discussions with as much flexibility, creativity and imagination as possible and to move beyond their existing proposals towards a compromise or intermediate solution. At the same time, he asked the neighbouring States to seek ways to do more in support of his efforts.

16. Building on his earlier discussions with the members of the Group of Friends and on a statement they had issued calling on the parties and neighbouring States to intensify their support for his efforts and show more flexibility, my Personal Envoy was able at each stop to convey the unanimous concern of the Group's members over the risk of increased instability and insecurity throughout the region owing to the ongoing conflict in Mali, as well as their strong desire that the parties enter into genuine negotiations and that the neighbouring countries intensify their assistance.

17. In discussing substance with the Personal Envoy, the parties and neighbouring States nonetheless kept to well-known positions, as expressed at the highest level in each case. King Mohammed VI argued for Morocco's autonomy proposal and a confirmatory referendum. The Secretary-General of Frente Polisario, Mohamed Abdelaziz, argued for a referendum with multiple options, including independence. The President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, stressed Algeria's commitment to the principle of self-determination as expressed in a referendum. The President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, maintained Mauritania's long-held posture of "positive neutrality". With regard to the new approach of bilateral consultations

and possible shuttle diplomacy to find a compromise, Morocco responded favourably. Frente Polisario, while initially expressing fear that the idea of compromise played in favour of Morocco's autonomy proposal, agreed in the end to engage on the basis of the new approach. The neighbouring States expressed general support, with Algeria again making it clear that it is not a party to the conflict.

18. During my Personal Envoy's second visit to Western Sahara, he met with advocates of autonomy, independence and human rights, as well as local officials, in both Laayoune and Dakhla. My Special Representative accompanied him for the meetings on the western side of the Territory, which, in Laayoune, were held in MINURSO headquarters. Saharans of all political persuasions told him that they feel excluded from the negotiations meant to determine their future. Among both supporters and opponents of the autonomy proposal of Morocco, a lack of trust in its implementation was evident, the overriding concern being the need for strong guarantees to ensure that Saharans would obtain and retain a predominant role in the governance of the Territory. Many also felt that human rights concerns had to be addressed immediately if the autonomy proposal was to be credible.

19. Following a series of bilateral consultations on the margins of the General Assembly, my Personal Envoy returned to the region from 12 to 25 October 2013 to make the acquaintance of new interlocutors in Morocco, Algeria and Mauritania and to confirm their readiness to proceed with the new approach outlined during his previous consultations. He asked the parties to name small working groups to engage with him in this new phase and made it clear to both parties and neighbouring States that future discussions would have to address both of the crucial aspects of the Security Council's repeated guidance: first, the substance of a mutually acceptable political solution and second, the means by which the people of Western Sahara would exercise self-determination.

20. In Morocco, my Personal Envoy met with the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Salaheddine Mezouar, the new Minister-Delegate for Foreign Affairs, Mbarka Bouaida, the Prime Minister, Abdelilah Benkirane, the heads of both houses of Parliament and the Board of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council. His interlocutors confirmed their willingness to engage on the basis of the new approach, but voiced unease about conducting discussions outside the framework of their autonomy proposal, whose "pre-eminence" they insisted that the Security Council has recognized. They also expressed concern about the sincerity of Frente Polisario and Algeria, stating their belief that the latter should play a more direct role in the search for a solution. My Personal Envoy emphasized that flexibility is needed from all parties if progress is to be made, since the negotiating process is being conducted under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations and each party is thus free to accept or reject the proposals of the other. With regard to the role of Algeria, he indicated that, for the United Nations, the formal parties are Morocco and Frente Polisario, but that Algeria had signalled a readiness to be helpful provided that the principle of self-determination is respected.

21. In the refugee camps near Tindouf, my Personal Envoy met with the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario, Mohammed Abdelaziz, the Coordinator of Frente Polisario with MINURSO, M'hamed Khaddad, the head of the negotiating delegation of Frente Polisario, Khatri Adduh, and other officials. His interlocutors reiterated their willingness to engage on the basis of the new approach. At the same time, they insisted that any negotiated solution must respect the inalienable right of

the people of Western Sahara to self-determination through a three-option referendum. My Personal Envoy replied that, while the Security Council has identified self-determination as one of the two core issues to be addressed, it has not specified the form that this might take. Frente Polisario officials also noted that, regardless of the final status of Western Sahara, solid international guarantees for the terms of any agreement would be critical. The Secretary-General of Frente Polisario and several others underlined the continued interest of the organization in human rights in the Territory and in the refugee camps and reiterated their hope that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights would visit. More broadly, they welcomed the increased visits of non-governmental organizations, parliamentary delegations and journalists to Western Sahara and the camps. In this regard, they expressed particular interest in a visit by the Secretary-General.

22. During his third visit to Western Sahara, my Personal Envoy, again accompanied by my Special Representative, met once more with a broad range of Saharans, this time in Laayoune and Smara, as well as with local officials and with the representatives of the regional offices of the National Human Rights Council. As had been the case following earlier visits, he reported that it was impossible to determine the relative strength of the pro-autonomy and pro-independence tendencies. However, Saharans of all trends expressed renewed frustration over what they see as the exclusion of indigenous Saharans, whether in the Territory or in the refugee camps, from the negotiating process, or their inadequate representation therein. Some went so far as to express the view that neither the Government of Morocco nor Frente Polisario truly represents their interests. Major demands concerned not only a greater role in the negotiations, but also the reunification of fragmented families, the preservation of the cultural identity of the indigenous population, greater attention to the legal aspects of resource exploitation, exploration of ways to channel international assistance to Saharans living in the Territory and more seminars sponsored by UNHCR. Pro-independence Saharans called again for the empowerment of civil society by, among other things, allowing associations that are critical of autonomy and that champion human rights to register and function legally in the Territory.

23. In Mauritania, my Personal Envoy was received by the President, Mr. Abdelaziz, who reaffirmed his country's "positive neutrality" in the conflict over Western Sahara, as well as its readiness to host seminars sponsored by UNHCR in Mauritania. While in Nouakchott, my Personal Envoy also met with several former Frente Polisario members, who were critical of the organization's current direction.

24. In Algeria, my Personal Envoy held discussions with the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ramtane Lamamra, the new Minister-Delegate for African and Maghreb Affairs, Madjid Bouguerra, the then Prime Minister, Abdelmalek Sellal, and diplomatic representatives of the donor community. In his meetings with his Algerian interlocutors, he stressed the need for Algeria's help in pushing the parties towards a solution to the Western Sahara conflict. In reply, they expressed a willingness to work closely with him, as developments warranted. At the same time, they underscored once again that Algeria will never become a party to the negotiations and that the conflict should be linked neither to the state of relations between Algeria and Morocco nor to the advancement of regional integration.

25. During the period from November 2013 to March 2014, my Personal Envoy initiated a new series of consultations with members of the Group of Friends, visiting successively Washington, D.C., Paris and Madrid. In these consultations, he sought the renewed support of interlocutors for his new approach and for his emphasis on the need for the parties to address both the substance of a mutually acceptable political solution and the means of exercising self-determination. He also requested that the members of the Group join him in impressing upon the parties the need for flexibility in the search for a compromise. In Madrid, he also expressed his appreciation for Spain's continuing facilitation of his mission through its provision of a Spanish Air Force aircraft for his travel within the North African region.

26. Interlocutors in all three capitals expressed their support for my Personal Envoy's new approach and their understanding of the need to address both the substance of a solution and the means of achieving self-determination. Similar visits to London, Moscow and other capitals will be arranged on a mutually agreed schedule.

B. 2014 consultations in the region

27. From 18 to 30 January 2014, my Personal Envoy visited the region to take the first practical steps in the new approach by presenting a number of questions to the parties to clarify the issues, their positions and their readiness to be flexible. To preserve the confidentiality of the discussions, and as agreed with the parties and neighbouring States, he made no statements to the press.

28. In Rabat and in Tindouf, my Personal Envoy met with the parties' newly formed working groups to present questions tailored to each party, on a confidential basis. These were deliberately challenging, designed to push the parties outside their comfort zone, introduce them to conversations different from those of the past and encourage them to demonstrate flexibility as they begin to consider alternatives to their initial positions and to search for elements of compromise. In Algiers and in Nouakchott, the emphasis was on encouraging the Governments of Algeria and Mauritania to find new ways to assist in the search for a solution.

29. In every encounter, my Personal Envoy made it clear that the United Nations had, for some 30 years, used all possible means to help the parties reach a settlement, including the negotiation of plans, the organization of face-to-face meetings and, now, bilateral consultations with the possibility of shuttle diplomacy. He emphasized that options were running out for the negotiating process and that progress needed to be made in the course of 2014, since delays were to no one's advantage. In this regard, his contacts with the members of the Group of Friends revealed a growing impatience and mounting pressure to deliver tangible results.

30. My Personal Envoy returned to the region from 27 February to 7 March 2014 to meet with the working groups formed by Morocco and Frente Polisario and to receive their responses to the questions put to them during the consultations held in January 2014. He also pursued his discussions in Algeria and Mauritania on how best they could contribute to the search for a settlement.

31. In agreeing to the new approach presented during previous consultations, the parties had also agreed to a code of conduct that imposes the rule of confidentiality on their discussions with my Personal Envoy, except where they explicitly agree that

something can be shared more widely. This being the case, my Personal Envoy again refrained from any statements to the press. At this early stage, he can report only that the responses received in the first exercise with the parties remain within the parameters of their respective formal proposals, despite the exhortations from many quarters that they go beyond their proposals and demonstrate flexibility in identifying elements of compromise. There was, however, a measure of hope that the parties may be able to take a more flexible approach in future discussions.

C. Next steps

32. My Personal Envoy and his team will review the responses that the parties provided in the most recent consultations. The briefing to the Security Council, to be held in October, will provide an opportunity to convey a first assessment on whether or not this new approach is proving fruitful. To allow the parties ample opportunities to engage, my Personal Envoy plans to hold bilateral discussions with them and with the neighbouring States, approximately once a month, in the intervening period. A face-to-face meeting of the parties and the neighbouring States will be convened only if enough progress emerges from the bilateral consultations to warrant such a meeting.

IV. Activities of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara

A. Operational activities

33. As of 6 March 2014, the military component of MINURSO stood at 225 personnel, 13 of whom are female, against the authorized strength of 231. The military component remains deployed at nine team sites and at liaison offices in Tindouf and Dakhla. From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, MINURSO conducted 9,327 ground patrols and 544 aerial patrols, to visit and monitor units of the Royal Moroccan Army and the military forces of Frente Polisario for adherence to the military agreements. In the course of the patrols, MINURSO military observers regularly monitored 570 units, 29 training areas and 316 observation posts, as well as 355 notified operational activities by the Royal Moroccan Army on the west side of the berm. East of the berm, the military observers regularly monitored 93 units, eight training areas and 38 observation posts, as well as two notified operational activities by Frente Polisario forces. The military observers also monitored the security situation to keep the Mission abreast of possible illegal activities that could affect the safety of the observers. Patrols were also conducted to monitor the demonstrations that Frente Polisario supporters mounted at times east of the berm, and to prevent and defuse tensions. MINURSO relations and communications with the two parties remained positive and productive throughout the reporting period.

34. The demands on MINURSO military observers have increased considerably over the years, owing to the growth in military dispositions west of the berm and the reduction of the Mission's air assets. I reiterate my previous assessment and recommendation (see S/2013/220, para. 48) to increase the military component of the Mission by 15 military observers. I further recall that adjustments to the authorized strength over the years, most recently by the Security Council in its

resolution 1056 (1996), have been conditioned upon the premise that they would not impair the Mission's operational effectiveness in the field. In my assessment, MINURSO has now reached the point at which operational effectiveness is being compromised by a shortage of military personnel.

35. MINURSO observed and recorded six general violations of military agreement No. 1 by the Royal Moroccan Army, a significant decrease from the previous reporting period, when 42 such violations were recorded. Long-standing violations remained essentially as previously reported (see S/2013/220, para. 39). As for Frente Polisario forces, MINURSO recorded one general violation, with long-standing violations also remaining as previously reported (see S/2012/197, para. 34). The Mission's assessment is that both parties remain fully committed to and respectful of the ceasefire and that their observed violations do not jeopardize it in the medium term. Rather, as has been observed in previous reports, they have resulted in a gradual shift in the military balance between the parties over the years.

36. In its dialogue with MINURSO, the Royal Moroccan Army reiterated its argument that its long-standing violations are either civilian in nature or constituted preventive security and safety measures meant to counter general security threats unrelated to the conflict. MINURSO continued to insist that these security issues be addressed within the framework of military agreement No. 1.

37. The lack of precise ceasefire terms and differing interpretations of the provisions in the ceasefire agreement represent a major challenge to MINURSO monitoring operations and continue to erode the Mission's authority. My Special Representative has therefore initiated a process of structured consultations with the parties to update military agreement No. 1, on the basis of proposals forwarded by the parties. Following his discussions on the subject with military leadership on both sides, first meetings of working groups at the military level were held with the Royal Moroccan Army in Agadir and with Frente Polisario forces in Rabouni, in February and March. I call on the parties to cooperate with my Special Representative and the Force Commander in overcoming differences and reaching an agreement on updating military agreement No. 1 to reflect present-day realities.

38. In January 2014, for the first time since its inception, MINURSO witnessed a violation of the status-of-forces Agreement when a group of Royal Moroccan Army soldiers gained unauthorized entry to the Mahbas team site, in pursuit of five unarmed civilians attempting to stage a demonstration inside the site. The five Saharan activists were apprehended in the operation by the Moroccan soldiers. My Special Representative protested the violation to the Moroccan Government, receiving assurances that Morocco remains committed to strict implementation of the status-of-forces agreement, including respect for the inviolability of United Nations premises. He was further assured that the incident in question was isolated and unique and did not constitute a new practice. On two earlier occasions, in late March and mid-June 2013, when unarmed civilians gained unauthorized entry into MINURSO premises, for the purpose of staging demonstrations, the Royal Moroccan Army had offered to intervene, but the offer was declined by my Special Representative. These situations were resolved by MINURSO with the help of local dignitaries and legislators.

39. During the reporting period, no immediate or specific threat to the security of United Nations staff was reported on either side of the berm. Still, the Mission's area of responsibility continued to be vulnerable to the repercussions of regional

instability. Indeed, security concerns continue to be a challenge to MINURSO operations. Both Morocco and Frente Polisario have highlighted substantial criminal and extremist activities in the regions adjacent to the Territory. Operating in an area in proximity with porous borders east of the berm, the Mission's unarmed observers remain exposed. Some sources have indicated that terrorist groups are actively recruiting to consolidate their presence in neighbouring regions and expanding their weapons supply. While neighbouring Algeria and Mauritania have considerably increased security measures near their borders, the geography of the region has always made it difficult to provide complete protection against hostile elements.

40. MINURSO has increased its alertness and capacity to gather situational understanding and improve the security and safety of its military observers and civilian staff alike. My Special Representative regularly visited team sites on both sides of the berm and the Tindouf liaison office, inter alia, to review the security arrangements in place and consult the local representatives of the parties on security matters. Algeria and Mauritania have considerably strengthened border control, which is likely to mitigate the risks, although limited capacity remains an issue on the border between Mauritania and the Territory.

41. West of the berm, Moroccan security forces provide security to United Nations personnel, military observers, premises and assets, as do Frente Polisario forces east of the berm. At the request of the Mission, Frente Polisario also provides MINURSO observers with armed escorts for patrols in the vicinity of the border with Mauritania. MINURSO military observers, for their part, maintain a high level of vigilance and regularly conduct emergency evacuation readiness exercises. Night patrols continue to be suspended east of the berm, for security reasons.

42. Algeria and Frente Polisario provide security for the United Nations presence and operations in Tindouf and the camps nearby. Through UNHCR, the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection of the European Commission and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, have funded additional capacities, including an international security officer integrated into the MINURSO security management system, to increase security for humanitarian activities in the camps. The joint security coordination committee, established in 2011 (see S/2013/220, para. 62), continues to be a useful mechanism for cooperation among the United Nations, Frente Polisario and humanitarian partners. As the designated official for security, my Special Representative held regular exchanges with the United Nations humanitarian agencies in Tindouf and the nearby refugee camps. Enhancement of security is still required in 2014 with regards to coordination, implementation of reinforced static security measures and expansion of security awareness/management skills training for humanitarian staff.

43. Widespread contamination caused by landmines and explosive remnants of war throughout Western Sahara continues to endanger the lives of the local, nomadic and refugee populations, along with MINURSO military observers and logistical teams. East of the berm, two civilians were injured in a mine accident. In addition, Frente Polisario reported a significant loss of livestock to mines, especially in the buffer strip. The Royal Moroccan Army reported 12 accidents, in which 1 person was killed, 18 were injured and 1 was unharmed, west of the berm. MINURSO, through its Mine Action Coordination Centre, continues to strive to reduce the threat and impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war and to improve cooperation on mine action initiatives with both parties.

44. East of the berm, humanitarian mine clearance and risk education activities were implemented through partnerships with two international non-governmental organizations, Action on Armed Violence and Norwegian People's Aid; one local non-governmental organization, the Sahrawi Campaign to Ban Landmines; and a commercial contractor, Mechem. Although new threat areas were discovered, the Mine Action Coordination Centre continued to maintain a reduction rate of 85 per cent of cluster strike areas. Between April 2013 and March 2014, demining teams cleared 3,814,913 m^2 of land and destroyed 1,720 items, including cluster bomb units, unexploded ordnance and anti-tank mines.

45. During the same period, the Royal Moroccan Army conducted demining operations to the west of the berm and reported the clearance of more than 259,140,000 m^2 of land and the destruction of 1,542 items, including anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance.

46. With the support of MINURSO, Frente Polisario established the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office in September 2013, with the aim of eventually assuming coordination of mine action activities to the east of the berm. MINURSO intends to support this office with technical assistance.

B. Substantive civilian activities

47. During the reporting period, my Special Representative enjoyed regular and positive contact with the parties and their respective coordination offices, maintaining a fruitful dialogue on issues related to the implementation of the Mission's mandate. MINURSO received an increasing number of visits by foreign delegations and diplomatic officials at its Headquarters in Laayoune and its liaison office in Tindouf. My Special Representative established regular contact with the regional human rights offices in Laayoune and Dakhla and sporadic contacts with local elected officials and tribal sheikhs. Similarly, MINURSO political affairs officers travelled on occasion to Smara and Dakhla for consultations with local authorities as part of the regular dialogue established between the Special Representative and Moroccan authorities.

48. However, the Special Representative was able to meet with civil society representatives and human rights activists in the Territory only in the presence of my Personal Envoy during his visits in Laayoune, Dakhla and Smara. The inability of my Special Representative to have independent contact with civil society means that the ability of MINURSO to form its own picture of the situation in Western Sahara for the purpose of operational awareness and reporting to the Secretariat and the Security Council remains limited. The underlying reason for this challenge to MINURSO operations is Morocco's interpretation of the MINURSO mandate as strictly limited to ceasefire and military matters, and not extending to matters related to civil society.

49. East of the berm, and with regard to the refugee camps near Tindouf, good working relations with Frente Polisario were maintained through the MINURSO liaison office in Tindouf. Good contacts were established with the newly created Sahrawi Committee for Human Rights. The personnel of United Nations agencies and the staff of the liaison office were able to move freely. My Special Representative met on several occasions with civil society organizations, which were generally supportive of the main policy lines of Frente Polisario. Reports of

more critical perspectives within civil society in the camps could not be verified, with the occasional exception, as in the case of the aforementioned demonstration in front of UNHCR premises in Rabouni.

50. The issues related to the placement of Moroccan flags around MINURSO premises and the issuance of number plates have now been largely resolved through pragmatic solutions agreed upon with the Moroccan authorities. The former issue had already been resolved in April 2013 and all but one of the Moroccan flags around the perimeter of MINURSO headquarters have now been removed. As for the number plates, as agreed between my Special Representative and the Moroccan authorities, a gradual replacement of the Moroccan plates with plates chosen by the United Nations will be starting soon. Once that process is completed, the perception of MINURSO neutrality will no longer be affected by the negative impact of the flag and number plate issues.

V. Humanitarian activities and human rights

A. Persons unaccounted for in the conflict

51. The International Committee of the Red Cross continued to work with the parties and families concerned in pursuing the question of persons still unaccounted for in relation to the conflict. An exhumation of a mass grave near the Mehaires team site, east of the berm, by Spanish forensic experts allowed eight Saharan families to recover the remains of relatives missing since 1976. MINURSO observers attended their burial ceremony, on humanitarian grounds. Findings were corroborated by interviews of relatives and eyewitnesses and published in a report on 10 September 2013. The team stated that it is aware of additional mass graves in the area.

52. In a letter addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Moroccan National Human Rights Council stated that, like other unsolved cases, the eight cases concerned had been the subject of exchanges between the Government of Morocco, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Advisory Council on Human Rights, the National Human Rights Council and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The National Human Rights Council stressed that it was ready to receive any formal information that would help achieve progress in establishing the truth. It had committed to contacting the families of the eight persons referred to in order to gather new information, "bearing in mind that these cases can always be tried through Moroccan courts, according to Moroccan law and international law".

53. Further to conflicting accounts on those disappearances, from Amnesty International and Morocco's Instance Equité et Réconciliation, several non-governmental organizations called for investigations to be re-opened into cases of enforced disappearance. Non-governmental organizations further called for the preservation of evidence of these and other mass graves.

B. Assistance to and protection of Saharan refugees

54. In accordance with its mandate, UNHCR continued to provide international protection and, together with its partners, basic life-saving assistance to the refugees in the camps near Tindouf. This included the implementation of multisectoral activities in water, sanitation, health, nutrition, shelter and non-food items. Through the four additional field units established in 2012, UNHCR implemented its mandated responsibilities in protection monitoring and improved communication with refugees through regular field visits. Pending the registration of the refugees in camps near Tindouf, humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) continued to be based on a population planning figure of 90,000 vulnerable refugees, with WFP giving an additional 35,000 food rations to people with poor nutritional status in the camps.

55. UNHCR and its partners covered up to 60 per cent of the needs in the refugee camps by providing consumables and reagents for X-rays, laboratories, dental care services, incentives for health-care staff, support for medical doctors' commissions, and nursing training. The main health concerns were diabetes, high blood pressure, anaemia, heart disease and hepatitis B. The main gap faced in providing health care was replacing old and outdated medical equipment. UNHCR also supported multidisciplinary medical commissions, mainly to surgeons, in order to provide specialized consultations to the refugees in the camps on a quarterly basis. During 2013, more than 4,000 specialist consultations were carried out, with some 48 per cent of patients being women.

56. Supplementary feeding was provided to some 10,000 refugees, focusing on reducing chronic malnutrition and anaemia for all children below the age of 5 and for lactating and pregnant women. It also provided incentives for medical staff, therapeutic food supplements, such as Plumpy'nut and F-100/F-75 therapeutic milk formula, and behaviour change communication activities. In addition, capacity-building for staff and refugees focused on infant and young child food practices, food habits and nutrition. Gaps remain in the infant and young child food programme for breastfeeding and food diversification.

57. All refugee children aged between 6 and 14 had access to primary and lower-secondary education in schools in the camps. UNHCR and its partners covered incentives for some 1,765 refugee teachers in the camps, carried out trainings for teachers and enhanced school management. It also provided essential school materials and books to teachers and students. Water tanks were installed in 16 schools to ensure clean water, which supported the school feeding programme of WFP.

58. In 2013, UNHCR and its partners distributed 8 months' worth of cooking gas per family, covering 66 per cent of the needs. Two thousand tent materials and accessories were also provided to vulnerable refugee families. The gap remains high given the sharp decrease in bilateral funding (13,176 tents are still required, representing 70 per cent of the total need). UNHCR provided adequate potable water to all refugees in the camps (17-20 litres per person per day). It also maintained the existing water network, provided family water storage for some refugee households, improved water quality and provided incentives and training for staff. Ten water trucks were replaced between 2011 and 2013. Gaps remain in providing additional water tankers and constructing two wells. Hygienic kits were

distributed to 38,450 women and girls of reproductive age. UNHCR and partners also supported a soap-making workshop and a bleach factory, and implemented waste management projects in the camps and in Rabouni. The assistance gap remains at 66 per cent.

59. UNHCR supported the running costs of a mechanical workshop for the repair and maintenance of vehicles and provided better fleet management for over 100 vehicles and generators.

60. The quality of sexual and gender-based violence response was improved through the implementation of a comprehensive strategy of referral mechanisms for cases of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR also provided incentives and transport for psychologists and gave support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

61. To examine the growing socioeconomic pressures on the refugee population in more detail (see para. 9), my Personal Envoy met with the representatives of the various United Nations agencies working in the refugee camps. All agreed on the need to rethink the humanitarian aid programme in such a way as to encourage a shift away from protracted care and maintenance assistance. Acknowledging the growing dissatisfaction, especially among camp youths, who have known no other life, as well as the possible security threats that might arise, Frente Polisario officials for their part called for urgent action to create economic opportunities in the camps, as well as renewed efforts to achieve concrete progress towards a solution to the conflict over Western Sahara. In meetings with United Nations interlocutors, those officials cautioned that any development activities should not come at the expense of the humanitarian assistance programme.

62. In December 2013, UNHCR organized a high-level donor mission to visit the refugee camps, together with WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund. The Foreign Ministry of Algeria participated in the mission, along with representatives from key donor countries. The mission participants spent a full day in the camps to look at the assistance provided to refugees, their living conditions and the remaining assistance gaps. They were briefed about the activities of UNHCR and partners in the camps and expressed their support.

63. During the high-level mission of UNHCR in September 2013, discussions took place with the concerned authorities on the pending issue of refugee registration in the camps. UNHCR agreed with these authorities to send a registration expert, in the second quarter of 2014, to discuss the modalities for conducting registration in the camps.

C. Confidence-building measures

64. In conformity with its mandate and its principles, and with the cooperation of the Government of Morocco and Frente Polisario, UNHCR continued to implement the confidence-building measures programme to facilitate contact and communication between Saharan refugees in the camps near Tindouf and their families in the Territory. Family visits, cultural seminars and the coordination meetings in Geneva between the two parties (Morocco and Frente Polisario) and the two neighbouring countries (Algeria and Mauritania) are the three fundamental components of the updated plan of action, of January 2012, for the confidence-

building measures programme. MINURSO supports the programme by providing medical staff and police officers to facilitate preparations, serves as security escorts and provides joint presence with UNHCR at destinations.

65. To date, a total of 19,702 persons (57 per cent women and 43 per cent men) have benefited from the family visits programme, since 2004. In November 2013, UNHCR, in cooperation with both parties, undertook a confidence-building measures registration exercise in the refugee camps and the four towns in the western part of the Territory (Laayoune, Boujdour, Smara and Dakhla) to allow qualified and interested families to take part in the programme. This exercise included verification of previously registered families to complete and update their information. A total of 5,669 persons were newly registered (2,739 in the Territory and 2,930 in the camps). Around 28,500 persons from both sides are currently waiting to benefit from the family visits programme and for the resumption of flights, which had been suspended since June 2013 but are to be resumed on 17 April 2014 as a result of intensive negotiations by UNHCR with the parties.

66. A fourth cultural seminar, linking Saharan refugees in the camps with their communities in the Territory, took place in the Azores from 28 October to 3 November 2013. The event was organized by UNHCR with the support of the Government of Portugal. It gathered a total of 42 participants from both sides and was facilitated by three independent professors from Mauritania. Coordinators from the Government of Morocco and Frente Polisario were also present. A total of four seminars have been conducted since September 2011 and a fifth seminar took place in the Azores in March 2014 to bring together all the 145 participants of the previous four seminars, in order to consolidate the good practices and lessons learned.

67. In June 2013, following engagement with the parties, UNHCR chaired its fifth coordination meeting in Geneva to review the confidence-building measures programme with the two parties and the two neighbouring countries. All participants reiterated their full support for UNHCR and their encouragement to continue with its humanitarian activities. An extraordinary meeting took place in Geneva in December 2013, with the same participants, with the sole purpose of discussing the resumption of the family visit flights, which had been suspended at the end of June 2013 and are to resume in April 2014.

68. In June 2013, the Policy Development and Evaluation Service of UNHCR, together with the Middle East and North Africa Bureau of UNHCR, conducted an independent evaluation of the confidence-building measures programme in order to review its management and operations, as well as to assess the humanitarian impact of the programme. The conclusion of the evaluation report was generally positive, particularly with regard to the humanitarian impact of the family visits and the importance of the cultural seminars. The report recommended an increase in family visits and the continuation of cultural seminars. It also recommended that donors should increase their financial support for the confidence-building measures CBM programme, given its humanitarian objective of linking families divided by the conflict.

69. In September 2013, UNHCR organized a high-level mission to the region led by the Chef de Cabinet of the High Commissioner, together with the Head of the North Africa Unit of the Middle East and North Africa Bureau, to review the implementation of UNHCR mandated responsibilities in the camps, as well as its

confidence-building measures programme. A number of meetings were held with senior interlocutors in Algiers, Tindouf, Rabouni, Rabat, Laayoune and Nouakchott. In addition, the delegation met with diplomatic and non-governmental organization representatives, including members of civil society and the media, as well as refugees. In meetings with MINURSO, cooperation in the confidence-building measures programme and security questions were discussed. UNHCR received full support and cooperation from all its interlocutors, with a strong message to continue with its humanitarian work under its mandate and as stipulated in successive Security Council resolutions. During the mission, the assistance gaps for 2013 were addressed, resulting in an increase of the overall UNHCR budget for 2013 from $10 million to $13 million.

D. Human rights

70. During the reporting period, the two parties continued to trade allegations on a wide variety of human rights violations. However, positive developments relating to the protection of human rights also occurred. These included the announcement of the establishment and reinforcement of human rights organizations, steps to reform judicial procedures and increased visits by international representatives and observers.

71. To reinforce the role and effectiveness of the work of the Moroccan National Human Rights Council and its regional offices in Laayoune and Dakhla, the Moroccan Government announced on 13 March 2014 that henceforth it would respond to all complaints submitted by these bodies within a three-month period. At the same time, focal points will be identified within the relevant ministries to facilitate their interaction with the National Human Rights Council and accelerate the examination of complaints.

72. The National Human Rights Council kept the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) regularly informed of the activities of its regional offices in Western Sahara. In 2013, the regional offices received 551 complaints of alleged violations of human rights and carried out six fact-finding missions. They also monitored demonstrations and carried out a range of other activities, including observations of trials, prison visits and capacity-building initiatives for numerous stakeholders. Pursuant to an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior, the regional offices held a series of human rights training sessions for the police forces of Laayoune and Dakhla.

73. In May 2013, Morocco ratified the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. In a letter dated 20 March 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mezouar, notified me that his Government is about to deposit the instruments of ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

74. The Moroccan authorities continued to cooperate with mandate holders of special procedures of the Human Rights Council and to facilitate their access to Western Sahara.

75. In June 2013, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, visited Morocco, as well as the city of Dakhla in Western Sahara. She expressed her appreciation for the open and frank discussions she held

with the authorities and with civil society organizations. She also noted the willingness of the authorities to institutionalize best practices, as seen in hospitals and court-based approaches to gender-based violence. At the same time, she expressed concern over the situation of irregular migrants and domestic workers, as well as cases of child labour and sexual exploitation. The Special Rapporteur will present her report to the Human Rights Council in June 2014.

76. In December 2013, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Morocco, as well as Laayoune in Western Sahara. During its stay, it enjoyed the full cooperation of the authorities, was able to access every place of detention it had indicated a desire to visit and was able to interview detainees of its choice in private. In its preliminary statement and its opinion No. 19/2013 (see A/HRC/WGAD/2013/19), the Working Group expressed concern over the number of confessions allegedly obtained as a result of torture in the course of preliminary investigations. The Working Group will present its report to the Human Rights Council in September 2014.

77. For 2014, Morocco has expressed its readiness for a follow-up visit by the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment to review implementation of the steps Morocco has taken in this domain. In addition, Morocco has informed me that visits of the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the Special Rapporteurs on the independence of judges and lawyers and on freedom of religion or belief are expected in the course of 2014.

78. Regarding civil and political rights, the United Nations continued to receive communications alleging abuses of such rights in Western Sahara west of the berm, particularly in the form of arrests without warrants, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in detention, limitations on family and advocate access to detainees, confessions extracted under torture, violation of the right to a fair trial, conditions that may amount to enforced disappearance and infringement of the rights of freedom of speech, association and assembly. OHCHR also received complaints about specific cases in which investigating judges failed to open investigations into defendants' allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, despite their lawyers' requests to do so.

79. Civil society organizations, including human rights groups active in Western Sahara west of the berm, continue to face obstacles in registering as non-governmental organizations, despite a judicial decision in their favour. Such obstacles have deterred several associations from initiating the registration process, while others suspended their activities after the authorities allegedly refused to receive their applications.

80. Regarding freedom of speech, association and assembly, the United Nations received reports that several individuals, including children, had been arrested for participating in demonstrations in Laayoune and Smara. Charges against these individuals included "violence against public officials", "participating in an armed gathering", "placing objects on a road obstructing traffic" and "damaging public property". The complaints relating to arrests without warrants, torture and other forms of ill treatment and repeated postponements of defendants' hearings that were lodged by families of alleged victims met with no response.

81. The case involving the Saharan civilians condemned to long sentences by the Military Tribunal in Rabat on the basis of charges brought after the Gdim Izik events of 2010 is ongoing (S/2013/220, para. 84). Local and international human rights organizations have reported serious concern for the health of 17 of the 22 prisoners, pursuant to allegations of torture and other forms of ill-treatment committed by Moroccan law enforcement officials. Members of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited the prisoners at their place of detention in Salé, in December 2013, and expressed concern over their deteriorating health. The Working Group added its voice to mine and to those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture in expressing disapproval of the use of military tribunals to try civilians.

82. In his letter dated 20 March 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs informed me that a draft law on military tribunals had been approved by the Government Council, at a meeting presided over by King Mohammed VI, and by the Council of Ministers, and that this law would be submitted to Parliament for discussion and adoption during its April 2014 session. Its provisions include prohibitions against recourse to military tribunals for civilians accused of any offence during peacetime, military personnel accused of common law offences, persons accused of offences against the external security of the State and minors. The draft law also provides for a military court of appeals.

83. Regarding civil and political rights in the refugee camps, Moroccan officials and the media reported abuses, particularly in the form of restrictions on freedom of movement and the violation of freedom of expression, association and assembly. According to United Nations personnel working in the camps, opportunities exist to express discontent, particularly over deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and the absence of any progress towards a settlement. Camp authorities have taken no action against the protesters camped in front of a UNHCR compound in Rabouni and within shouting distance of the main road. With regard to freedom of movement, travel in and out of the camps has been regulated for security reasons, particularly since the crisis in Mali, but it is our understanding that those with valid documents can travel freely.

84. In several letters to me, the Secretary-General of Frente Polisario called repeatedly for "international monitoring of the observance of human rights in both Western Sahara and the refugee camps", arguing that this would provide the best possible guarantee that violations will not occur and would also constitute the best possible confidence-building measure for the negotiating process. He also reiterated the readiness of Frente Polisario to cooperate with the human rights bodies of the United Nations, called for monitoring the observance of human rights in the refugee camps, even in the absence of an overall mechanism, and proposed that the High Commissioner for Human Rights visit the refugee camps and Western Sahara itself for a first-hand assessment of the situation. Furthermore, in the refugee camps administered by Frente Polisario, the Secretary-General of the organization announced the creation of a Sahrawi Committee for Human Rights.

VI. African Union

85. MINURSO continued its cooperation with the observer delegation of the African Union in Laayoune, led by Ambassador Yilma Tadesse (Ethiopia), as well as its support to that delegation with logistical and administrative assistance drawn from its existing resources.

86. The interest of the African Union in the Western Sahara issue and the invitation of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, to my Personal Envoy to visit Addis Ababa were the subject of numerous letters and démarches to me and to my Personal Envoy throughout the reporting period. Frente Polisario and Algeria expressed support, while Morocco registered its strong opposition, notably in a letter addressed to me by King Mohammed VI.

87. At the request of the African Union, my Personal Envoy met with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the margins of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly. He expressed his recognition of the important role that the Organization of African Unity and its successor, the African Union, had played in the first phases of the search for a settlement. That said, he noted that in 2007 the Security Council had mandated a process of direct negotiations between the parties under the auspices of the United Nations. A period of confidential consultations with each party was to begin shortly, and its results would be communicated to the Council and other stakeholders as appropriate.

88. In December 2013, a comprehensive African Union report on the Western Sahara issue, as well as a letter from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, reiterating her invitation to my Personal Envoy, were circulated to the members of the Security Council. Frente Polisario and Algeria reiterated their support, while Morocco reiterated its opposition.

VII. Financial aspects

89. The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/283, appropriated the amount of $58.4 million for the maintenance of MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014. Should the Security Council approve my recommendations on the extension of the mandate of MINURSO and the increase in authorized strength, as recommended in paragraph 34 of the present report, the cost of maintaining the Mission until 30 June 2014 would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

90. The proposed budget for MINURSO for the period from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015 in the amount of $54.0 million (exclusive of budgeted voluntary contributions in kind), based on the current authorized strength for MINURSO, has been submitted to the General Assembly for consideration during the second part of its resumed sixty-eighth session (A/68/699). With regard to my recommendation on the increase in the authorized strength, I will seek additional funding from the Assembly, if necessary.

91. As at 2 April 2014, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for MINURSO amounted to $42.4 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $1,746.5 million.

92. As at 31 March 2014, amounts owed to troop contributors totalled $600,000. Reimbursement of troop and contingent-owned equipment costs has been made for the periods up to October 2013 and October 2010, respectively, owing to the insufficiency of cash in the special account of the Mission.

VIII. Observations and recommendations

93. In the light of the presence of Western Sahara on the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories since 1963, the efforts of the United Nations, through the work of my Personal Envoy, my Special Representative and MINURSO, will remain highly relevant until its final status is established.

94. As noted in the present report, my Personal Envoy has embarked on yet another approach in the negotiating process, on the basis of bilateral consultations and shuttle diplomacy. The briefing to the Council in October will provide an opportunity to convey a first assessment on whether or not this new approach is proving fruitful. I call upon the parties to recognize the need for urgent progress and to engage seriously on the two core issues in the Security Council's guidance: the content of a political solution and the form of self-determination. I ask that the international community, and in particular the neighbouring States and the members of the Group of Friends, to provide support for this endeavour. If, even so, no progress occurs before April 2015, the time will have come to engage the members of the Council in a comprehensive review of the framework that it provided for the negotiating process in April 2007.

95. I am pleased that the humanitarian family visit flights, which are aimed at uniting people separated for the past 40 years, will resume on 17 April 2014. I congratulate the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its efforts and encourage it to continue with its wider confidence-building measure activities. I am also pleased to note the steps taken on the pending issue of registration of refugees. In line with its mandate and principles, UNHCR will be discussing the modalities of carrying out this exercise with the concerned authorities, and I encourage continued progress and full cooperation with UNHCR in this regard.

96. I urge the international community to provide urgent funding for the confidence-building measures programme and the programme mandate of UNHCR in the refugee camps near Tindouf, given the existing gaps in key areas of assistance such as protection, health, nutrition, food security, shelter, water and sanitation. I also urge the relevant United Nations agencies, the donor community, Frente Polisario and the Algerian authorities to explore programmes to respond to development needs in the camps, especially education and employment for the youth.

97. In the light of increased interest in the natural resources of Western Sahara, it is timely to call upon all relevant actors to "recognize the principle that the interests of the inhabitants of these territories are paramount", in accordance with Chapter XI, Article 73 of the Charter.

98. I welcome Morocco's cooperation with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. I note with satisfaction the steps that Morocco has taken, such as those related to the Moroccan National Human Rights Council and the military tribunals, as described in paragraphs 71, 72 and 84 of the present report. I look forward to their full and speedy implementation.

99. I also take positive note of Frente Polisario's expressed readiness to cooperate with United Nations human rights bodies, and of its establishment of the Sahrawi Committee for Human Rights.

100. While welcoming these developments, I encourage both parties to continue and further enhance their cooperation with United Nations human rights bodies. I believe that such actions, covering both Western Sahara and the refugee camps, would contribute to creating an environment conducive to the initiatives taken so far, as well as to the negotiating process. Such positive developments should contribute to a more balanced and comprehensive monitoring of human rights. The end goal nevertheless remains the sustained, independent and impartial monitoring of human rights, covering both the Territory and the camps.

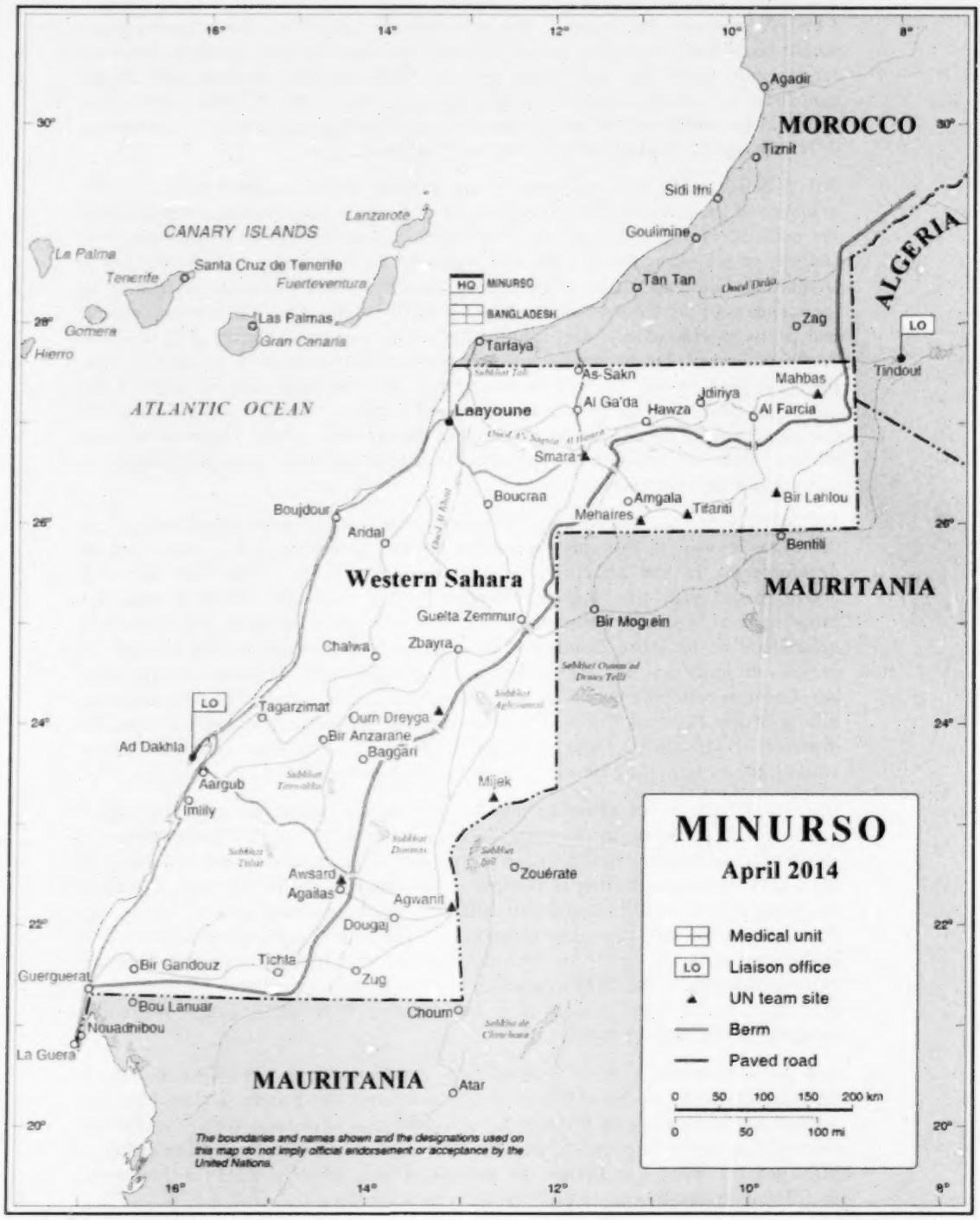
101. I believe that, as a guarantor of the stability of the ceasefire and as visible evidence of the international community's commitment to achieving a resolution of the conflict, the presence of MINURSO remains relevant (a) as an instrument of stability in the event that the political stalemate continues; (b) as a mechanism to support the implementation of successive Security Council resolutions relating to the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara; and (c) to provide independent information on the conditions on the ground to the Security Council, the Secretariat and the international community. I therefore seek the assistance of the Council in reasserting the mandated role of MINURSO, upholding peacekeeping standards and United Nations neutrality and ensuring that the conditions for the successful operation of the Mission are met. I also call on both parties, Morocco and Frente Polisario, to cooperate fully with MINURSO in achieving these objectives.

102. MINURSO has helped keep the peace through its effective monitoring of the ceasefire, as well as by reporting on the military activities of both sides and on developments in and affecting its area of responsibility, conducting demining activities and providing logistical support to the confidence-building measures programme of UNHCR. Within the constraints in which it operates, MINURSO has maintained its ceasefire monitoring function and its presence on the ground has played an important role in deterring the parties from breaking the ceasefire agreement or resuming hostilities. In this context, and in the light of the continuing efforts of my Personal Envoy, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of MINURSO, with a modest increase of 15 military observers to the authorized strength, for a further 12 months, until 30 April 2015.

103. In addition to its ceasefire monitoring function and as the only significant international presence in Western Sahara, MINURSO is also responsible for standard peacekeeping functions, such as monitoring, assessing and reporting on local developments affecting or relating to the situation in the Territory, as well as on political and security conditions affecting the negotiating process led by my Personal Envoy. The reporting function of MINURSO, although still limited, is indispensable, including for my Personal Envoy. I hope that the limitations that still exist with regard to the "free interaction with all interlocutors" with MINURSO, as referred to by the Security Council in its resolution 2099 (2013) can be overcome, building on the progress achieved so far.

104. In conclusion, I wish to thank my Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, for his repeated engagement with the parties. I also thank my Special Representative in Western Sahara, Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber, and Major General Edy Imam Mulyono of Indonesia for their able and dedicated leadership of MINURSO. Finally, I also thank the men and women of MINURSO for their work, in difficult circumstances, to fulfil the Mission's mandate.

Annex



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